

‘Los pájaros are feliz and are dreaming about gwiazdy.
Facilitating Translingual Creative Writing in the Primary Classroom’¹
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Abstract:

Although one in five state-educated children in England speaks a language other than English at home, there is little space in the National Curriculum for the expression of this linguistic heritage. In this article we make the case for facilitating multilingualism in the primary classroom through translingual creative writing, which involves mixing two or more languages. We draw on empirical research with a class of lower Key Stage 2 children of diverse linguistic backgrounds and abilities at a school in south London. The pupils were set the task of writing a poem that combined English with other languages so that we could observe how they engaged with the process of translanguaging. We suggest that translingual writing exercises in the classroom provide a range of benefits, including the creation of a space for the valorisation of children’s cultural capital; the facilitation of valuable peer-teaching and collaboration; freedom to explore playfulness with language; and a chance to experiment with and reflect on creative writing processes.

Keywords:

Translingualism, Translanguaging, Heritage Languages, Creative Writing, Key Stage 2

‘We do not think in Arabic, Chinese, English, Russian, or Spanish; we think beyond the artificial boundaries of named languages in the language-of-thought.’

Li Wei, 2018

Despite misconceptions of English society as largely monolingual, a substantial and ever-increasing number of its children grow up speaking more than one language. Department for Education figures indicate that 21% of state-educated primary pupils and 17% of state-educated secondary pupils speak a language other than English at home (DfE 2018a, 10). In cities such as London and Leicester, the figure rises to around 50% across all age groups (DfE 2018b). In this article, we argue that space should be made in the classroom for experimentation with multilingualism in creative writing, examining how this can be implemented at primary level through the composition of translingual poetry. Our empirical research with a culturally diverse group of south London schoolchildren involved their writing a poem that moved between two or more languages, drawing on their knowledge of English and Spanish, which is taught at the school, as well as any languages spoken at home. Our work feeds into the Translingual Strand of the AHRC’s OpenWorld Research Initiative (OWRI) “Cross-Language Dynamics: Reshaping Community”, led by the University of Manchester and based at the Institute of

¹ This research was funded by the AHRC’s OpenWorld Research Initiative (OWRI) “Cross-Language Dynamics: Reshaping Community”.

Modern Languages Research (IMLR), School of Advanced Study, University of London. This nationwide project explores ideas and experiences of migration, wellbeing, language and identity within migrant communities in the UK as part of a multi-million-pound investment in examining the role of Modern Languages in contemporary society. Catherine Barbour's work on translingual migrant writing during an OWRI Visiting Research Fellowship led to investigation into how multilingual Key Stage 2 children can use more than one language in creative writing, the overarching goal being to promote community engagement and research impact through education. This was carried out in partnership with Karina Lickorish Quinn, who in response to Barbour's research question designed and led a translingual workshop that took place in February 2019. The research draws on Barbour's background in Hispanic cultural studies and interests in translingual migrant writing and translanguaging pedagogy, and Lickorish Quinn's experience as a writer of bilingual prose fiction, a school English teacher, and a teacher of creative writing.

In primary education, consideration of a child's access to language is paramount, as this is when the initial process of developing literacy takes place. Whilst there has been extensive research in the field of multilingual and heritage language pedagogy in recent years, with a focus on secondary and higher education (see, for example, Gilmour 2017; Otsuji and Alistair Pennycook 2018; Andrews, Fay and White 2018; Creative Multilingualism 2016), empirical studies on the role of translingual practice in primary level education in the United Kingdom continue to be scarce. Our research question therefore broadly considered 'How do multilingual children/heritage speaking children/children learning a second language at primary level engage in translingualism through creative writing?' We designed a workshop to investigate this that involved Year 3 pupils aged 7-8 in a school selected for its high proportion of pupils with multilingual, immigrant heritage and its focus on Modern Foreign Languages (MFL)., as evidenced by the fact that Art and Design and Technology are taught through the medium of Spanish from Reception through to Year 6,² following the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach to cross-curricular teaching through a foreign language.

Although our approach is particularly relevant to classroom demographics which include a high proportion of multilingual or EAL (English as an Additional Language) pupils, it is hoped that a similar method may also facilitate the incorporation of translanguaging into English lessons with children who are learning a second (foreign) language for the first time.

The institutionalisation of monolingualism

The English school system continues to enforce a strictly monolingual paradigm whereby English is for the most part the sole language of communication. This is bolstered by the prevailing political emphasis on the cultural integration and assimilation of immigrant communities, reignited since the Brexit referendum in June 2016, which disregards and devalues the linguistic and cultural richness of contemporary Britain. In the controversial 2019 report entitled 'The Glue That Binds: Integration in a Time of Populism', the Tony Blair

² The project underwent full ethics review at the School of Advanced Study, University of London. Parental consent was granted for the anonymous dissemination of the children's work.

Institute for Global Change asserts that, with ‘far-right bigotry on the rise’, migrant communities have ‘a duty to integrate’ (Redgrave et al 2019). The report claims that one of ‘the essential foundations of integration [is] the ability to speak a common language’ and in terms of anti-immigrant sentiment, ‘fears are exacerbated when newcomers are perceived as not adapting to the host country’s language’ (Redgrave et al 2019).

However the marginalisation of heritage and community languages by education policy is not a new phenomenon. The government-commissioned Swann Report, which was published in 1985 and sought to examine academic under-performance amongst ethnic minority children, controversially and influentially shifted responsibility for maintaining minority languages to families and communities (Swann 1985). Provision of heritage language education for immigrant and ethnic minority children in England (and the UK more broadly) has tended to be provided by complementary schools, also known as community or supplementary schools, which do not receive government funding and are not Ofsted inspected (Li, 2006).

Meanwhile, the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) curriculum, which still tends towards Eurocentrism despite an increase in the provision of languages such as Arabic and Mandarin (Tinsley and Doležal 2018), is threatened by socio-political shifts, educational trends and a lack of resources, with disparities between primary schools in terms of offerings (see Tinsley and Board 2017, 9). Since the mid-1990s, there has been a continual decline in the take-up of MFL (Tinsley, 2019) and since the Brexit referendum teachers are reporting increased expression of attitudes by parents and students that, with Britain leaving the EU, the study of languages is no longer relevant (Tinsley 2019, 15). Moreover, the diverse home languages of English school children which are not offered as part of the MFL curriculum are subjected to relative invisibilisation, which correlates to the lack of socio-economic power afforded communities which lie outside the dominant framework (Patrick 2010, 176), whether these be English-born or immigrant communities.

What is more, the National Curriculum not only adheres to a monolingual paradigm in which heritage languages are not provided for, but also limits the varieties of English that may be taught. The National Curriculum’s programme of study for English requires the teaching of ‘Standard English’, defined by the Department for Education as ‘the variety of English which is used, with only minor variation, as a major world language’ (DfE 2013, 84-85). In asking ‘do we work against social justice aims if we do not teach to and assess using a standardized English?’ (2016, 174), Won Lee rightly highlights the imperative of developing English literacy amongst all children in England in the quest for equality across the intersections of ethnicity, class and gender. Yet this insistence on Standard English remains problematic in many ways: firstly, it implies that there is only one correct form of English and overlooks the reality of the many versions of English spoken within the UK and around the world. There exists not just one English, but multiple Englishes, a number which greatly increases when we consider the varieties of English spoken outside England (see Trudgill and Hannah 2013). Social prejudice against dialects and accents alternative to the so-called standard, which are markers of region, ethnicity or class, continues to be rife in the education sphere (Yiakoumetti and Mina 2011, 287), even though it has been shown that bidialectism does not necessarily

impact on literacy in Standard English (Williamson and Hardiman 1997) and can even facilitate a child's learning another language (Yiakoumetti and Mina 2011).

The potential of translanguaging pedagogy

The suppression of languages and dialects that deviate from the 'standard', which is often linked to the intersections of ethnicity and class, can impact negatively on a child's learning process:

as the agents of political states, schools are the monitored settings par excellence. In them, children whom the society calls bilingual or multilingual are asked to engage in severe acts of suppression of about half the contents of their linguistic repertoire, whereas white, monolingual students are asked to suppress just a little. Bilingual and multilingual students are then assessed with instruments that forbid the use of the full content of their linguistic system, whereas monolingual students are allowed to enlist almost its full content. (García 2019, 164).

By providing a space in the curriculum to experiment with *translanguaging*, understood here as the act of switching between and cross-fertilising languages and dialects, we counteract the dogma of institutionalised monolingualism to enhance learning potential and capitalise on the linguistic and cultural diversity to be found amongst England's schoolchildren. Translanguaging can involve code-switching (switching between languages in alternate clauses or sentences) and code-mixing (switching between languages within sentences, clauses or even words), but has also been more precisely theorised as the fluid cognitive process through which language is formed and communicated (Li 2018). The implementation of a 'translanguaging pedagogy' which takes such hybridisation into account, for example through writing which moves between the official language(s) of education (in this case, English) and other parts of students' language repertoires, can challenge the socio-historical and ideological construction of languages and identities, provoking us to 'think beyond the boundaries of named languages and language varieties including the geography-, social class-, age-, or gender-based varieties' (Li 2018, 19). Li Wei, drawing on the work of Ofelia García, Angela Creese and Adria Blackledge, contends that:

by deliberately breaking the artificial and ideological divides between indigenous versus immigrant, majority versus minority, and target versus mother tongue languages, Translanguaging empowers both the learner and the teacher, transforms the power relations, and focuses the process of teaching and learning on making meaning, enhancing experience, and developing identities (Li 2018, 15).

As a challenge to bounded and hierarchical conceptions of languages, cultures and identities, the opportunity to engage in translanguaging in the classroom can be empowering and transformative (García, 2019: 165), with the creative contact between languages resulting in new cultural imaginings. As an individual's linguistic repertoire is changeable over time according to exposure to the language and access to education (see Amati Mehler in Firmat, 2003: 9), translanguaging pedagogy can accommodate the fact that the linguistic abilities of children from multilingual homes can vary considerably, especially when there is no formal

schooling available in the language(s) they use. Indeed, many of the home languages spoken in England are not standardised or the variety is dialectal. Pupils may have only passive knowledge of the language which may not be the result of direct transmission from their parents, or may have familial or cultural links to the language rather than any tangible knowledge of it. Otsuiji and Pennycook (2018) advocate what they refer to as the ‘translingual advantage’ of an approach to pedagogy in which students can draw on any aspect of linguistic and cultural knowledge in their learning; for example, mixing language varieties or code-switching in oral and written work without having to conform to a specific standard of linguistic ability and practice.

Crucially, bilingual and multilingual children have been shown to have learning needs which are not at present sufficiently accommodated in the British education system. For too long, the literacy and language education of EAL pupils has been approached through a ‘deficit model’, whereby their existing language skills have been seen as ‘problems that need to be sorted out before they can be included’ in learning rather than as an asset (Conteh 2019, 2). The focus of their English-teaching has been on ‘transitional bilingualism’, that is, on moving the children from their existing language(s) and replacing these with English (Conteh 2019, 52). For students who are beginning to learn English in our classrooms, too often ‘the development of their home languages stagnates owing to lack of support and opportunity to acquire literacy skills, and this may adversely affect their acquisition of the school language, which leads to subtractive bilingualism’ (Stavans and Hoffman 2015, 151), whereby learning one language detracts from and diminishes another.

The monolingual paradigm causes us to treat multilingual children as if they were ‘two [or three or more] monolinguals housed in the same mind’ (Yip and Matthews 2007, 258) – as if they can and should entirely separate the languages that they speak. However, research into the language acquisition of bilingual children suggests that, though their languages develop as separate grammatical systems, these systems develop in and through interaction with each other (see Yip and Matthews 2007). If the child is still in the process of acquiring the languages and forming the cognitive grammatical systems, there will be what Yip and Matthews have called ‘bidirectional influence’ between that child’s language systems (2007, 26). As such, by behaving as if our multilingual children can and should exclude their home languages from their learning of speaking and writing in the English classroom, we are failing to provide the opportunity to explore and share what language means to them. We are also barring children from the considerable benefits that exist for those who are able to maintain their home languages whilst learning English (Gándara 2015). There is, therefore, increasing awareness of and support for an ‘additive bilingualism’ model, in which multilingualism is valued and English is ‘seen as part of [the child’s] ever-growing language repertoires, not as a replacement for their other languages’ (Conteh 2019, 52). Indeed, the Research in Primary Languages Network has called for improved links to be made in the classroom between all the languages children know, especially the first languages of EAL learners, as important to developing their metalinguistic awareness and overall literacy (RIPL 2019, 10).

Introducing and legitimising translanguaging in the classroom offers an opportunity for multilingual and EAL learners to exercise their full and emergent linguistic repertoire. It also allows monolingual English-speaking children to experiment with and enjoy the vocabulary and linguistic elements acquired in MFL teaching and used in regional dialects. This, we hope,

might erode some of the perceived, fictive boundaries between languages, the cultural isolationism exacerbated by discourse surrounding Brexit and the global spread of right-wing populism, and the social class barriers erected by an insistence on so-called Standard English in academic settings.

Implementation of a translanguaging pedagogy

Research by Teresa Tinsley and Kathryn Board suggests that in primary schools in England with high numbers of EAL students there is a general willingness to provide support for pupils' home languages; but in practice this willingness might not translate into meaningful support (Tinsley and Board, 2016: 66). There is also a concern that schools might limit their support of so-called EAL pupils to the provision of resources to help them improve their English, rather than with time or resources into invest in their heritage and home languages (Tinsley and Board 2016, 66).

Facilitating multilingual and translingual practice within an education system that prioritises monolingualism is not without its challenges. We recognise, as educators ourselves, the pressures of day-to-day classroom teaching in which teachers often lack the funding, resources, time and training to meet all the children's needs in the manner they might wish. In relation to the context of language teaching generally, primary schools reported key challenges of a lack of curriculum time; a lack of staff confidence and language proficiency; and a lack of resourcing and training (Tinsley and Board 2016, 55). In the context of heritage language support, while some schools report hiring staff who speak local community languages, this becomes more difficult in schools where a diverse range of heritage languages are spoken (Tinsley and Board 2016, 67). The implementation of a translanguaging pedagogy necessitates cultural sensitivity on the part of the educator, with lessons appropriately tailored to the student demographic, so that the heterogeneity of multilingual speakers in terms of linguistic and cultural backgrounds and identities, as well as abilities, is acknowledged. Moreover, teachers can understandably be hesitant to encourage multilingualism when national assessment criteria demand a focus on literacy in Standard English, and they may be unsure how to facilitate the use of heritage languages that they themselves are not familiar with. Though Modern Foreign Language teachers, for example, may be more confident about encouraging translingual practice in aspects of their teaching because of their own linguistic expertise, teachers with backgrounds in other disciplines could perhaps be more hesitant or indeed unsure as to how to go about this. However, the teacher's own linguistic proficiency and experience does not have to be a determining factor, because what should be emphasised, we would argue, is cross-cultural exchange and experimentation. Overall, however, there continues to be a lack of directive policy, as well as resources and teacher-training in this area. Planning multilingual lessons raises a raft of questions for educators: how do we approach the disparity in oral and written abilities in a language only spoken at home? How should multilingual writing be assessed? And how can pupils from monolingual backgrounds be included in this learning process, especially in less culturally diverse areas?

We suggest that creative writing, with its inherent space for playfulness and experimentation, is a productive context for introducing translanguaging into the classroom. The work of the poet Kate Clanchy with students at Oxford Spires Academy exemplifies the fruitful creative power of making space for students to explore their multilingualism (Creative

Multilingualism 2016). Secondary school students at Oxford Spires Academy participated in creative writing workshops run by writers in Arabic, Polish, and Swahili and were invited to write poems in whatever language they wished. Their work has been collated into two anthology pamphlets available online, *Roots and Branches* and *Leaves and Letters* (Creative Multilingualism 2016) and a collection published by Picador, entitled *England: Poems from a School* (2018). Their work received national attention on social media and in the press, with one of the students going on to win the Betjeman poetry prize for 10- to 13-year-olds.

While Clanchy's work was supported by the funding and infrastructure available from the AHRC OWRI project's Prismatic Translation Strand (see OCCT website), we suggest a translanguaging pedagogy can be introduced to the everyday classroom through creative writing lessons in a way that is relatively low stakes, easy to design and easy to implement, even for a teacher with limited confidence in MFL. The methods used could also be expanded to bilingual settings, an example from the UK context being Wales, where schoolchildren could experiment with translanguaging between English and Welsh, or also settings where students speak different dialects at home.

Our workshop is an example of a self-contained lesson in which translanguaging can be facilitated, but it would also work well as part of a longer unit of work in which pupils could read model texts that explore multilingualism and translanguaging. In a survey of poetry teaching practice undertaken in 2006/2007, Ofsted concluded that, while students at primary level were being given relatively more opportunities to engage with original creative composition of poetry than their secondary level peers (Ofsted 2007, 6), there tended to be a lack of variety in the poems being studied by primary pupils. There was a particular lack of variety in the cultures and traditions from which poems were selected, with the same poets (Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, Roald Dahl) featuring again and again across schools (Ofsted 2007, 13). A focus on poetry that plays with translanguaging might be an exciting way to rise to the call made by Ofsted to widen the variety of texts taught at primary level, not only because it would make space for children with heritage languages to bring those into the classroom, but also because translanguaging is an important part of the contemporary poetry scene in England and across the world. Sarah Dowling has examined the 'translingual poetics' that has emerged in the US as a resistance to the monolingual, Anglophone paradigm that has managed to erect English as *the* 'native' language of a nation in which it was originally a foreign settler language (Dowling 2018). While contemporary poetry in England has arguably not (yet) had quite the translingual turn it is having in the US, translanguaging in poetry is nonetheless important to the writing practice of many British poets, including several who feature in GCSE English Literature poetry anthologies like Benjamin Zephaniah, John Agard, Daljit Nagra, Sujata Bhatt, Tony Harrison and Mary Casey, all of whom write poems which explore the linguistic encounter that occurs when languages, dialects and accents meet. Running our workshop as part of a longer scheme of work in which translingual poetry was read would assist pupils to achieve a "balance between analysis, composition and personal response which involve[s] pupils in thinking about poetry and provide[s] the opportunity for them to enjoy their own creativity" (Ofsted 2007, 8) in a way that would not only prepare them to later study the

translingual poetry that features in the GCSE English Literature syllabuses but also, more importantly, expose them to exciting developments taking place in contemporary poetry.

Workshop design

We carried out our workshop on translingual creative writing with thirty-three Year 3s at a school in south London with a student body that consists of children with diverse cultural, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds and has a creative, multicultural ethos that fits our interests in translingualism. Crucially for our study, this school has adopted a Content and Language Integrated Learning approach to the teaching of the creative subjects of Art and Design and Technology through Spanish from Reception to Year 6, thereby preparing children for using another language in specific contexts. This method of cross-curricular teaching through a foreign language, which we drew on in our teaching of creative writing through translanguaging, intertwines the learning and teaching of language and content, and either aspect can take on a more central role at any given time. The dual approach has been shown to enhance not only literacy and linguistic ability, but also cognitive flexibility and critical thinking:

Different thinking horizons and pathways which result from CLIL, and the effective constructivist educational practice it promotes, can also have an impact on conceptualization (literally, how we think), enriching the understanding of concepts, and broadening conceptual mapping resources. This enables better association of different concepts and helps the learner advance towards a more sophisticated level of learning in general (Coyle 2010, 10-11).

In addition to having creative lessons in Spanish, all year groups in the school where we carried out our research have dedicated hours for Spanish language lessons, which have an interactive, communicative focus. The Year 3s were developing a solid grounding in Spanish introductory vocabulary, having already covered greetings, numbers, colours and animals. They were able to draw on in their poetry, in addition to some new words related to the theme of the workshop. As it is in lower Key Stage 2 when pupils are expected to produce more complex sentences in their work and are increasingly exposed to writing creatively whilst not yet being under the pressure of assessment in English, we felt this would be an especially insightful stage on which to focus our project (DfE 2013, 23-30).

As our workshop was limited to a one-off 90-minute lesson, we faced the challenge of how to support the pupils (who we had not worked with before) in producing a complete written composition whilst also writing in multiple languages, a task which was likely to be unfamiliar to them. Writing is a complex cognitive activity at the best of times, and adding a translingual element to the task would no doubt make it more challenging still. We were aided in our planning by cognitive models of the writing process, particularly Flower and Hayes' influential model (1981) which identifies three key cognitive processes engaged in by skilled writers: planning, which includes generating ideas, organising ideas and setting goals for the text; translating the plans into written text; and reviewing, which involves both evaluating and revising the existing text. Subsequent refinements to the model have suggested further subdivision of the translation process into text generation (that is, the writer finding language

for their ideas) and transcription (the orthographic rendering of the language on the page) (Berninger et al 1996, 195-196). Crucially, Flower and Hayes (1981) posit that the various cognitive processes involved in writing are not consecutive linear stages; rather, a skilled writer is able to juggle between the processes throughout the composition of the text, monitoring whether the emergent text is meeting their goals and, equally, amending their goals and plans as the text emerges. Consequently, not only must the writer draw on long-term memory to retrieve subject knowledge, awareness of their audience, and schemas of writing (Flower and Hayes 1981), but the writing process also places significant demands on short-term working memory as the writer juggles the various demands of planning, translating and revising in real time (Olive 2012, 125).

Even skilled adult writers must engage the full capacity of their working memory to undertake the complex mental juggling involved in the composition process (Olive 2012, 126). While skilled writers deal with the intrinsic cognitive load of writing by developing schema for writing in long-term memory (see Pollock et al, 2002: 63 for a summary) and by automatizing some of the skills required, such as orthographical, syntactical, semantic and grammatical rules (McCutchen 1988), in ‘beginning writers’ who have not yet developed these skills, the likelihood of cognitive overload is high: the cognitive processes involved in writing develop at uneven rates and beginning writers struggle to juggle between the processes simultaneously (Berninger et al 1996; Olive 2012, 128). Children tend to develop translation skills before planning and revising skills (Berninger and Swanson 1994). Written text generation is affected by a child’s oral fluency (Abbott and Berninger 1993) and research suggests that a child’s capability at word-level text generation does not necessarily reflect their sentence-level and text-level generation and vice-versa (Whitaker et al 1994, 110-111).

We were primarily interested in how the children would engage with translanguaging at a sentence and text-level. We were also aware that in Year 3, asking the children to plan, revise, text generate and transcribe all at once would likely lead to cognitive overload (Sweller et al 2019). We were therefore influenced by Pollock et al’s instructional design approach of isolating some of the interacting elements to reduce cognitive load (2002). By removing some of the demands of planning, transcription, and revision, we would be able to isolate the sentence-level text generation process. To facilitate the generation of ideas for theme and narrative, we set the children the task of writing a poem about the night-time, a familiar and accessible theme (Figure 1). This decision was also informed by the fact that children had been working on poem-writing as a class: they had been learning about stanzas, lineation and rhyming and thus should have begun to develop some of the text-level schema needed.

Figure 1: Scaffolded Translingual Writing Task

In order to isolate sentence-level text-generation, we decided to provide the children with a card sort of printed words to rearrange. The card sort provided vocabulary about animals, bed-time objects, adjectives and verbs that the children could rearrange to construct lines of verse focusing on sensory descriptions of the night-time. We printed the card sort such that the English was on one side and the Spanish was on the other. This way, the children could flip each card and experiment with switching between the two languages within lines of verse without the cognitive demand of self-translating (Nawal 2018). In this way, children for whom

transcription or word-level text generation in either English or Spanish were a challenge would still be able to engage with sentence-level text generation and translanguaging. We invited the children to engage in the card sort-flipping activity in pairs so that their collaborative work would reduce the cognitive load borne by individual children further (Kirschner et al 2011).

However, we were keen to keep the task sufficiently open-ended that the children could challenge themselves to take the activity as far as they wanted. In our workshop design, we were conscious that in a typical class of Year 3 children, the range of working memory capacities would be from that of an average 4-year-old to that of an average 11-year old (Gathercole and Alloway 2007, 7). We also expected there to be a wide range of linguistic, orthographic and literacy abilities. Therefore, to avoid limiting the more confident pupils, after engaging with the card sort we encouraged the children to make additions of their own ideas and words in any language they chose and to share these ideas with their collaborators. In this way, the children who had the capacity to juggle more of the cognitive processes of writing simultaneously were able to do so at their own pace and the children also had the opportunity to learn language from one another. Crucially, we were interested to see whether the children would take their cues from the translanguaging encouraged by the card sort and introduce their own translingual elements to their poems.

Figure 2: Translingual Card Sort (English-Spanish)

The Children's Writing

Using the card sort in pairs, unsurprisingly, the children tended to begin by turning all the cards to the English side first and then constructing phrases solely in English. However, they very quickly began experimenting with switching between languages, with a few children choosing to alternate between Spanish and English line by line but with most code-mixing within lines, sentences and clauses, writing lines such as 'I can see grandes estrellas in the noche bella' [I can see big stars in the beautiful night]³ and 'The moon is feliz' [the moon is happy].

Once the children had begun to translanguage between Spanish and English, we encouraged them to start adding words and phrases from other languages that they knew from outside school. The range of second language abilities in this particular class spanned African, Asian and European languages, and included Amharic, Arabic, Cambodian, Finnish, French, German, Irish, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish, Tagalog, Tigrinya and Yoruba. Echoing the benefits of the CLIL classes in Spanish at the school, in our workshop the two pupils of Spanish-speaking heritage offered vocabulary they knew in Spanish, which valorised not only their expertise but also the other children's knowledge of a second language, affording them the real-world experience of trying out their second language with native speakers, rather than in the abstract. The readiness with which the children then incorporated their own language knowledge demonstrated that they had grasped the translingual code-switching modelled through the card sort, and were now able to translanguage with creativity and ease.

3

All translations into English are our own.

For example, Steven and Maddie⁴ added German and French respectively to make their poems trilingual:

Steven's Poem⁵

Yo puedo ver las estrellas in main
bet. I hear die loven roaring ciero
mis ojos and dream.

Yo oigo the wolves aullando ferocious
in dear vint. Ich can de shteane sien
twinkeling about. Dear mont en la
noche playing feliz I feel the beatiful
nacht.

Maddie's Poem

I can see los fantasmas allanda in my bed
saying bon nuie.

I close my eyes en mi came and say bon nuie to la
luna.

I can see grandes estrellas in the beautiful night
noche bella.

Je voise more of los fantasmas en mi cama and i'm
scared but I see more estrellas which make me less
scared.

I say bon nuie one last time to la luna as ciero
mis ojos.

Notably, both Steven and Maddie used the words and phrases in the card sort to inspire the phrases they then introduced in their own languages: Steven translated 'the lions/los leones' into 'die Löwen' (spelled phonetically as 'die loven' in his poem) and 'in my bed/en mi cama' into 'in mein Bett' (spelled as 'in main bet'), while Maddie translated 'I can see/yo puedo ver' into 'Je vois' (or 'Je voise' in her work). However both children also added their own phrases,

⁴ The children who participated in the study have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities and ensure full confidentiality.

⁵ We have transcribed the children's poems exactly as they wrote them without amending their spelling or punctuation.

as in Steven's introduction of the mountain ('dear mont') and Maddie's saying 'bon nuie' to the moon. We can also see in Maddie's poem her self-correction when she originally wrote 'beautiful night' in English and then decided she would like to use the Spanish 'noche bella' provided in the card sort. Although her first impulse was to resort to the English, she then decided to reach for the less familiar Spanish. Although we did not ask Maddie why she had made this choice, our future work with the class will engage the children in metacognitive questions reflecting on their writing choices. This would, for example, involve thinking about how their selections feel to them as writers and how they might impact their readers.

Steven and Maddie's writing is characteristic of many of the children who drew on languages they used at home and not at school in that they tended to have ample oral familiarity with languages but did not necessarily know the standard orthography of the words they selected. The children's solution to this challenge was to write the words phonetically, as in Steven's line 'Yo oigo the wolves aullando ferocious in **dear vint**' [I hear the wolves howling ferocious in the wind] (the German 'der Wind') or Maddie's 'I close my eyes en mi came and say **bon nuie** to la luna' [I close my eyes in my bed and say good night to the moon] (with Maddie finding her own spelling of the French 'bonne nuit'). This is an example of how the children's technical accuracy in writing their home and heritage languages does not have to be the focus of multilingual writing exercises, for as Valdés comments, 'it is the historical and personal connection to the language that is salient and not the actual proficiency of individual speakers.' (2001, 38). What remains key is facilitation of the children's ability to express and enjoy the full range of linguistic tools at their disposal, including the languages they can learn from one another.

The children showed great enthusiasm for not only drawing on their own languages but also learning what Sam Holmes has called 'snippets' or 'exuberant smatterings' of language from one another (Holmes 2015, 7). One example of such peer-teaching of snippets took place between Lily and Maya. Maya, who speaks Polish at home, wrote in her poem, 'W noce iste Gwiasdy/ los pájaros are feliz and are/ dreaming about Gwiasdy'. Although it is not clear what Maya meant by 'iste', it seems that these lines of verse translate as 'In the night I see stars. The birds are happy and are dreaming about stars.' Lily, who sat with Maya and is not a Polish speaker, also wrote in her poem, 'Los pajaros are feliz and are dream about the Gwiasdy' [The birds are happy and are dream (sic) about the stars] (Figure 3). What is interesting to note here is that Maya, a Polish speaker, was able to construct a whole sentence in Polish, including an adverbial opener, before then constructing a sentence which code-mixed Spanish, English and Polish. Meanwhile her classmate, Lily, whose native language is English, and for whom a

sort. What is exciting here is that the words on the card sort did not feature the greeting ‘good morning’. Harry’s inspiration to include this greeting came from what he learned from Filomena, and the idea of addressing the lions directly was his own creative choice.

The peer-teaching that took place during the lesson is an important example of how inviting children to bring their heritage languages into the classroom is enriching not only for the child bringing the knowledge but also for their classmates. The teacher, by becoming a facilitator to the children’s own knowledge, affirms and valorises the children’s diverse cultural capital and empowers them to become independent explorers of linguistic creativity, rather than reliant on the teacher’s instruction.

What Harry and Filomena taught each other demonstrates that valorising “‘bits of language” as opposed to “fluency” as a legitimate goal in language learning’ (Holmes 2015, 7) is an important strategy in teaching multilingual creativity. Holmes explains: ‘Rather than casting learners as struggling through the foothills in a grand ascent towards eventual “fluency”, they are empowered from day one to be adding ‘resources’ to their global ‘repertoire’ (8).

One might question the value of encouraging children to write multi- and translingually when national assessments in both MFL and English will impose a monolingual requirement. Do we risk confusing the children so that they will no longer be able to discern how or when to write monolingually, particularly in assessment contexts? This concern rather underestimates the proficiency of multilingual children, even from a very young age, in adapting their language. Bilingual children begin distinguishing between languages even in infancy (see Yip and Matthews 2007, 34) and although code-switching and code-mixing are often interpreted as evidence of the speaker’s deficiency in one or other of the languages being used, they are in fact examples of speakers drawing creatively on their full linguistic repertoire (see Stavans and Hoffman 2015, 178–179). As the poetry analysed here would suggest, encouraging children to experiment with translanguaging, code-switching and code-mixing is not, as some might fear, impoverishing their ability to communicate and create monolingually, but rather enriching their ability to celebrate and express their full linguistic repertoire. As every English teacher knows, varying language choices for audience and purpose are key skills in learning to write effectively. Variation of linguistic code is, we suggest, just one more facet of the young writer’s skill.

In Filomena’s poem (Figure 4), for example, we can see her emergent consideration of the language competence of her likely reader. Code-switching with Tigrinya, Filomena wrote:

boy Girl
 ‘(cemay haderka) (cemay haderkey)

Filomena makes some insightful writing choices here. The two Tigrinya phrases mean ‘good morning’, the first when directed to a male interlocutor and the second for a female interlocutor. Firstly, Filomena has independently found a way to phonetically spell Tigrinya words, transliterating them with Latin glyphs. Secondly, she chooses to explain to her reader, through the superscripted notes of ‘boy’ and ‘girl’, that these phrases are gendered. Filomena has recognised that her intended readers – that is, her teachers and peers – are unlikely to understand that the phrase ‘good morning’ might change to fit the gender of the interlocutor,

as this is not the case in English. She has therefore found a way to bridge the language gap between herself and her reader.

Figure 4: Filomena's Poem

Our session was not intended to explore metacognitive reflections by the children on their writing choices: we merely sought to determine what they would do when invited to translanguage. However, Filomena's poem exemplifies how writing multilingually provides fruitful opportunities to discuss with the children how their language choices might impact their reader and how they might adapt their writing either to bridge language gaps between themselves and their readers (through cushioning, contextualisation, glossaries or translations on the page) or, equally, how and why they might choose to leave aspects of their writing unintelligible to monolingual readers and what effect that choice might have. As Rachael Gilmour asserts, there is a 'productive power of *non*-understanding, where the fact that you do not understand is part of the poem's meaning' (Gilmour 2017, 302). Interestingly, for the children, discovering new words and sounds that they did not understand seemed to be part of the excitement. As we circled the room, it was notable that on every table the children were trying their mouths around new phonemes and phrases and, when some of the children performed their poems at the end of class, the others listened attentively and, it seemed to us, with pleasure. Many children are used to engaging with poetry containing sounds and nonce words used by the author not for their referential value but for their aesthetic or expressive function, for instance 'On the Ning, Nang, Nong' by Spike Milligan or Lewis Carroll's 'Jabberwocky'. Translanguaging in poetry provides an apt context in which to engage students in discussion about not only what a poem *means* on the page but also how it *feels* to be *heard* and *spoken*, especially when the referential function of the language is removed. Allowing students to engage with poems in which some, or all, of the language is only accessible on an aesthetic or emotive level is, we suggest, an important way of teaching, as Roman Jakobson put it, that 'a poetic work is... a verbal message whose aesthetic function is its dominant' (Jakobson 1981, 753). Thus, there is space in the multilingual creative writing classroom for important conversations about the relationship between writer, text, and reader, as well as valuable experimentation with language and cultural knowledge.

For the teacher facilitating multilingual and translingual writing, it is important to be willing to relinquish control, moving away from didactic teaching to engage dialogically with the children on their writing choices and processes. For example, in our own experience as speakers of English and Spanish working with a group of children whose abilities covered at least sixteen languages, the limits of our own knowledge allowed for the vibrant discussion and mutual exchange of languages and cultures, which gave the children agency, autonomy and representation in their own learning process. It was the very lack of understanding on our part that gave the children space to experiment and play with their linguistic repertoire. The children had freedom to explore their writing process without being as concerned about product.

Indeed, while creative writing has traditionally been taught with an emphasis on the student-writer's written product, contemporary creative writing pedagogy suggests that a focus on the student's writing *process* is in fact a more productive approach (Mayers 2015). The pressures of the assessment-driven system in which we practise makes it 'all too easy for the

teaching of writing to be reduced to teaching by correction after the event' (Green 2004, 63). Instead, the very act of writing itself must also be privileged, for 'teachers and pupils – if effective writing is to take place, and if an atmosphere of true creativity is to be established – must recognise the process of writing as innately valuable' (Green 2004, 45).

Despite the persistence of the view that creativity is innate and cannot be taught (see McCallum 2016 for a critique of this), as educators, we can engage our students in activities that will foster creativity, providing the 'fertile ground where new ideas and activities can take root, an environment in which ideas can be created, tossed around, shared and tried out' (Fisher 2004, 16). As Robert Fisher notes, creative people are unorthodox, 'curious and inquisitive... question accepted ways of doing things' and are adventurous in their thinking (2004, 13). Translingual creative writing presents an opportunity for students to cast aside orthodoxy and engage in linguistic playfulness. As Cheshire and Edwards argue, classroom discussions about language are 'a valuable educational experience in their own right, allowing children the opportunity to share their experiences of linguistic diversity with their peers and their teacher, and empowering them to face the adult world' (Cheshire and Edwards 2013, 50). By conceiving of a space for multilingual children to experiment with their multilingualism through translanguaging, we allow them to write with their own voice, the voice of their inner speech (see Pavlenko 2014), which is otherwise stifled by the monolingual paradigm of British education.

Conclusions

During a session that lasted only 90 minutes, the participants produced creative work that evinced experimental translingual writing choices that, in some cases, even showed the child's consideration of the reader's response and ability to access the language of the text. We recognise that further investigation is needed, particularly to explore the children's metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness of their translanguaging process, and would like to examine what prompted the children's writing choices. In their initial experimentation with the card sort, what influenced their decision to flip a word or phrase from English to Spanish? If the choice was essentially random, could we start to engage the pupils in more conscious, intentional decision-making and reflection on when and why they might code-switch for effect? In future work with the same school, we will be conducting focus groups with the children and, as they draft their pieces, encouraging dialogue about why they made certain writing choices and what the effects of those writing choices on the reader might be. Further research would determine how translingual writing can be used, even at this young age, to develop the children's understanding not only of the writer's craft, but also of what language means to them.

Our observations would suggest that even a discrete translingual writing workshop which opens up space for children to experiment creatively with language can have significant value, not least for multilingual and EAL learners. Translingual creative writing provides an opportunity to escape from product-oriented, assessment-driven and often restrictive models of teaching writing, freeing children to find agency, autonomy, and playfulness in the writing process itself whilst developing literacy in all their languages. Accommodation of diverse linguistic practices in the classroom presents enriching opportunities for peer-teaching and collaboration whilst allowing individuals to explore and express their own voices. In opposition

to current anti-immigration narratives of state nationalism and cultural isolationism, the celebration of multilingualism through creative translanguaging has the potential to bring visibility to minority communities, build student confidence and pride in their cultural heritage, and facilitate an environment of inclusivity, sensitivity and open-mindedness throughout the most formative stages of child development.

To finish with a timely anecdote, at a symposium entitled ‘Poetry, A Conversation: China and the UK’ at the University of Leeds in 2019, two British-born poets of Chinese heritage, Jennifer Lee Tsai and Jay Ying, read from their work. Tsai, whose debut pamphlet *Kismet* opens with a poem in which she recalls being ‘the only Oriental at a primary school in Birkenhead’ (Tsai 2019a) spoke about her development as a writer. She recalled her love of English lessons as a child but also remembered the challenge of discovering how her work might relate with the literary canon which she studied in school. In her poem ‘Another Language’, Tsai writes:

When I speak in Cantonese,
I’m almost a different person.
Louder, brighter. (Tsai 2019b).

How many pupils in English schools today continue to feel like they must be ‘a different person’ when writing as part of the school curriculum? For these children, we suggest, the opportunity to engage with translingual creative writing could be a transformative experience.

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